

## **The Inclusive Community**

**March 29, 2009**

**Homily of Anthony T. Padovano**

**Life**

**John 12: Verses 20-33**

**It is a powerful moment in the life of Jesus. In John's gospel, he has just entered Jerusalem in triumph. Jerusalem, the golden city, the citadel of David, the Temple of Solomon. The crowds come with palm branches and they proclaim him King of Israel. The raising of Lazarus from the dead is on everyone's lips. The Pharisees declare they are helpless before such an ovation. John quotes their leaders as saying: "the whole world has gone after him." Israel has found not only its king but the Messiah.**

**If you are beginning a movement, it does not get better than this.**

**All this is in the opening verses of chapter 12.**

**Today's passage shifts the scene from crowds to the apostles and to the inner life of Jesus. This dramatic change from the moment of glory to how it was affecting those close to Jesus and Jesus himself is riveting.**

**Hosannas still echo in the streets and palm branches are everywhere when something unusual happens. One would expect the next scene to be one in which the leaders of Israel approach Jesus, to ask him what he will do now, to inquire where he will take his followers, to get a measure of how this is affecting him and, of course, what part they themselves will have in all this.**

**Instead, a discordant note is sounded. A small party of Greeks, that is, Gentiles approaches two of the apostles. The apostles they engage, Philip and Andrew, are the only two of the Twelve who have Greek names. The small party must have felt that they would get a hearing from those who had some Greek reference, at least in their names.**

**Their request is simple and touching. "We wish to see Jesus."**

**Something in who Jesus was and how he conducted himself made them feel, astonishingly, that there might be a place for them in this moment.**

**The scene shifts again without following through on the Greeks or Philip or Andrew. We are told the Greeks went to Philip first and he must have felt nervous about having Gentiles on the scene. He does not want to handle this explosive issue. It is not time to bring in the**

**Gentiles. Everything is too volatile. John says that Philip sought out Andrew, part of the very inner circle of the Twelve. Philip and Andrew speak to Jesus and the scene ends without resolution or response.**

**John now brings us right into the soul of Jesus. He is in spiritual crisis. For him, the moment of glory is not Hosanna or palm branches, Temple or kingship, not even being the Messiah who will lead Israel to greatness.**

**His destiny is that of a grain of wheat which can have all its promise realized only if itself dies and is buried. This is not the kind of line you want to hear if you want to keep the party going.**

**“My soul is troubled,” Jesus says. He continues that God will rescue him if he asks but then Jesus will lose his destiny, his identity. He will survive but he will perish in a way other than death, by having become less than he might have been, by leading his disciples into glory and power, into the economics and prestige of the moment.**

**More politically astute than anyone else, he tells his followers and himself, that it does not end here in glory but on the cross. If it ends here, one generation, the current one, will get the trappings of success and then the message will be lost. If he gives instead a different vision, a kingdom of love, if he is willing to die for this and to show that death cannot destroy a kingdom of love, then he will prove that love is stronger than death. His decision to go this way will lead people with other priorities to kill him.**

**Not everyone can be Jewish, not everyone can be part of the generation contemporaneous with Jesus. But everyone can be part of a kingdom of love.**

**To insist that a kingdom of love is more important than being Jewish, more enduring than palm branches and Hosannas, more gratifying than power and riches, that would be a message worth a life, worth a death, even on the cross, if there were no other way.**

**John does not tell us what Jesus said when he was told that Gentiles wanted to see him. Maybe, however, this was a response to their wanting to see Jesus and a striking revelation of his destiny.**

**There will be room for the Gentiles, for everyone. But only when the palm branches are gone from the streets of Jerusalem and the Hosannas are silent, only when someone carries a cross to Calvary and is willing to die for a kingdom of love that most people did not feel was worth it. This is the real Temple, the real golden moment for the entire human family, a kingdom of love, so much a part of everyone’s life that there are no longer Jews or Gentiles in it.**

**Without the cross and the kingdom of love it creates, Palm Sunday gave the Movement one glorious day. If Jesus stood for something more than that, the afternoon of another day, on Calvary, outside Jerusalem, was needed. Palm Sunday was possible by entering the gates of Jerusalem. Easter required another entrance, from a hill outside the city, through a**

**kingdom of love where there were no walls or gates. The cross planted the kingdom of love in human hearts, in fields of wheat, where grains had died, so that all of us might have bread. In the breaking of bread, we found that there was enough for all and that no one was excluded from the table. A lesser man would have settled for Palm Sunday. Jesus wanted Easter!**